

Words Become Muddled Blurs As Assembly Races to Adjourn

By McCANDLISH PHILLIPS

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ALBANY, July 5—Everyone knew when the sun came up this morning that today was going to be the last day of the 1966 State Legislature—even if it took all week.

A few days ago both houses passed a resolution agreeing that they would adjourn as of 4 P.M. today.

The Legislature could not stop the course of the sun, so it did the next best thing: It stopped the clock.

At 14 minutes to 4 o'clock this afternoon, when it was clear that the year's business would take many more hours, the bronze hands on the Roman numeral clock at the back of the amphitheater-like Assembly chamber stopped dead. The hands ran a bit longer in the Senate, stopping at 10 minutes to 4. The sun declined.

To keep everything legislatively correct (and consistent with the adjournment resolution) time is assumed to be frozen, and it will be entered in the records that the session adjourned at 4 P.M. on July 5, 1966.

Blurred Tide of Words

At 12:10 P.M., as the final Assembly session opened the legislative process became a blur of words.

"An act to amend the Public Housing Law in relation to creating and establishing the City of Oneonta Housing Authority," the clerk, John T. McKennan rattled, "and providing for its rights, powers, duties and limitation." He read it as one word of 50 syllables in a dull monotone, with a little rise in inflection at the end.

"Without objection the bill is advanced," Assembly Speaker Anthony J. Travia said then, and many times later as other bills came up. After an imperceptible pause, he would command, "Read the last section."

Mr. McKennan would blurt out, "This act to take effect immediately." And Mr. Travia would say, "Call the roll!"

Mr. McKennan would lift his eyes and scan the chamber with the swift sensitivity of radar. Mr. Travia would declare the bill passed. The whole process took an average of 17 seconds on bills of no controversy.

In a chamber where a clock can be stopped, no one was inclined to fuss very much over freezing the calendar.

The Assembly's free-and-easy way with time, dates and figures was shown at 1:28 P.M., when Mr. Travia announced a "three quarters of an hour recess" for "a short lunch." At 3:29 sharp, he was back in his place on the high desk, calling the house to order.

Stanley Steingut of Brooklyn, having skipped lunch for important legislative consultations, slipped his glasses up on his forehead and peeled a grapefruit under his desk.

For state legislators, life in the capital was like a lottery today. There were terribly hard decisions to be made. At the railroad station this morning, two members from New York City waited for a cab. One carried an overnight bag, one did not.

One was for checking in at the DeWitt Clinton Hotel, and taking a chance on getting stuck with an unnecessary night's hotel bill (\$14).

The other was for saving the money, and taking a chance on getting stuck without a hotel room. "It will be a miracle if we get out of there," the one with the suitcase said. "I expect to go to 3 A.M."

As the day wore on, his \$14 risk looked better and better.

Back in the Legislature—long before midnight—feet were buried in ankle-deep drifts of bills that had been acted upon.

Cigar smoke curled up in ever-thicker columns under the many spotlights that stab down from the oak ceiling in the As-

sembly. One member gave a

page a \$20 bill and sent him

out for a fresh supply of long

cigars. When the page came

back the Assemblyman gave

him a cigar for a tip. Still there

seemed no disposition to hurry.

Hands shot up on votes and

fingers snapped like castanets

to draw the clerk's attention

to still-uncounted yeas or nays.

From 1:45 P.M. to midnight,

the Assembly passed four bills,

sent one back to committee and

laid two bills aside—disposing

of seven measures in 15 min-

utes.

At midnight it took up tax

relief for the telephone com-

pany coin-box calls.

"No tax can be collected on

10-cent calls because the boxes

won't take pennies," a member

argued. "Why should the com-

pany pay a tax it can't col-

lect?"

"The telephone company is

committing a crime by not col-

lecting it, technically," another

member explained.

No one wanted to demean

the process of democracy by

rushing, but a member who

wanted to make a five-page

speech was hooted down.